DRAFT MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION
Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) Removal Action Work Plan for a Non-Time Critical Removal Action, a 12-acre Equestrian Staging Area at East Elliott, Camp Elliott, San Diego, California.

Project Proponent:

Former Camp Elliott, Formerly Used Defense Site
Contact: Mr. Lloyd Goddard
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Phone Number: (213) 452-4014

Project Description:

The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) proposes to perform a surface/subsurface clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in East Elliott, Camp Elliott, The proposed project may also involve Intentional Detonations (Blow-in-place) once an anomaly is identified as UXO. The proposed activities will be conducted under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP) for Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) consistent with the National Contingency Plan and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act and relevant Department of Defense (DOD) and Army regulations and guidance for ordnance and explosive (OE) programs. The Initial Study is being prepared to assess the potential environmental impact from the clearance.

An Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) for East Elliott was prepared and the final review was completed in November 2000. Previous UXO response actions have also been conducted within the boundaries of East Elliott. Once the removal activities are completed, the City of San Diego plans to develop the site into a multi-use staging area to allow access of the City's Mission Trails Regional Park by horse riders, hikers and bicyclists. The City has certified a separate mitigated negative declaration for the development of the site.

Project Location:

East Elliott is approximately 3,200-acre, roughly rectangular area approximately 12 miles northeast of downtown San Diego and immediately west and northwest of the City of Santee. East Elliott comprises the southeast corner of the former Camp Elliott, a former Marine Corps training facility that was active in the 1940s and 1950s and once occupied 30,500 acres. Mission Trails Regional Park occupies 5,800 acres, located south west of East Elliott. The 12 acre project site is located in the northeastern portion of Mission Trails Regional Park about 300 yards east of the Mast boulevard underpass of State Route (SR)52. The site is bounded by the right-of way of SR52 to the north, the drainage out of Little Sycamore Canyon to the west, and a Caltrans mitigation Site and the San Diego River to the south.

An ordnance and explosives investigation in the East Elliott area was conducted to evaluate the nature and extent of ordnance contamination at East Elliott. The investigation consisted of dividing East Elliott into four sectors for the purpose of evaluating risk and developing recommendations for each area. The project area is mostly located in Sectors 3 and 4, with less than an acre outside East Elliott.

Findings of Significant Effect on the Environment:

Based on the analysis and conclusions found in the attached Initial Study, DTSC finds that the proposed project may have a significant impact on Biological Resources, as that term is defined in the Public Resources Code section 21068, unless the project proponent implements and complies with the mitigation measures described below that would avoid or reduce impacts to less than significant levels.

Mitigation Measures:

Biological Resources

Prior to the start of project activities, a qualified biologist shall attempt to locate the San Diego ambrosia (Ambrosia pumila) which may be present on the project site. If this sensitive plant is found on site, the plant shall be transplanted to an appropriate, protected site. The project location for the mitigation area is the existing San Diego ambrosia mitigation site located west of the Caltrans mitigation site. A 5-year monitoring program shall be required to provide assurances for its long-term success. The program should be consistent with the City of San Diego Mission Trails Regional Park San Diego Ambrosia Management Plan (May 15, 2000). The plan shall be approved by the program manager of the City's Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) and the Assistant Deputy Director of Land Development Review (LDR)/Environmental Analysis Section (EAS) prior to project construction.

In order to assure that the endangered least Bell's vireo in the project area are not adversely affected by project activities during the listed bird's breeding season (March 15 to September 15), no project activities would be permitted to occur during the breeding season if the noise levels exceed 60 dB (hourly average) or exceed the ambient noise level if the ambient level already exceeds 60 dB (hourly average) within the area occupied by the least Bell's vireo, unless adequate noise attenuation measures (i.e. noise barrier) are implemented. If project activities are anticipated during the breeding season, protocol surveys of the area within 500 feet of the site by a qualified biologist shall be required prior to start of project activities. If nesting vireos are identified, project activities must cease for the remainder of the breeding season unless a qualified acoustician can demonstrate that with or without noise attenuation measures, project activity noise levels will not exceed 60 dB (hourly average) within vireo-occupied portions of the surveyed area.

Any project activities into the least Bell's vireo breeding season (March 15 to September 15) shall be reported to the program managers of the City's MSCP and EAS. Intrusion into the breeding season shall require the submittal and approval of the survey results and/or the noise study by MSCP and EAS prior to start or continuance of project activities.

Coastal sage scrub where gnatcatchers have established breeding territories or suitable as foraging habitat will be identified by biologists from the US Fish & Wildlife Service immediately prior to consideration for surface clearance. Areas where birds are actively nesting or foraging will be marked in site survey maps and furnished as geospatially referenced polygons. Field personnel will respect a 200-foot buffer around these gnatcatcher tracts between the inception of fieldwork and mid-August. These regions will be completely off-limits to entry for all UXO activities until they can be reexamined later in the breeding season. With approval of the Fish and Wildlife Service, tentatively after September 15, personnel may then enter areas, thinning brush as necessary for detection and disposal of UXO, following standard procedures.

In order to assure that the threatened California gnatcatchers in the area are not adversely affected by project activities during the listed bird's breeding season (March 1 to August 15), no project activities would be permitted to occur during the breeding season if the project activity noise levels exceed 60dB (hourly average) or exceed the ambient noise level if the ambient level already exceeds 60 dB (hourly average) within the adjacent habitat occupied by the gnatcatcher, unless adequate noise attenuation measures (i.e. noise barrier) are implemented. If project activities are anticipated during the breeding season, protocol surveys of the area within 500 feet of the site by a qualified biologist shall be required prior to start of project activities. If nesting gnatcatchers are identified, project activities must cease for the remainder of the breeding season unless a qualified acoustician can demonstrate that with or without noise attenuation measures, project activity noise levels will not exceed 60 dB(hourly average) within gnatcatcher-occupied portions of the surveyed area.

Any project activities into the California gnatcatcher breeding season (March 1 to August 15) shall be reported to the program managers of the City's MSCP and EAS. Intrusion into the breeding season shall require the submittal and approval of the survey results and/or the noise study by MSCP and EAS prior to start or continuance of project activities.

White-tailed kites and red-shouldered hawks have been observed during biological surveys of the project site; these raptors forage on the gophers, jackrabbits, and woodrats observed in the extensive, non-native grassland areas in the immediate project vicinity. In order to avoid indirect impacts to nesting raptors in the project vicinity, project activities during the raptors breeding season (December 1 to June 30) shall be avoided unless a survey is conducted by a qualified biologist to confirm that no nesting raptors are located within 500 feet of the project area. If nesting raptors are identified, project activities shall not be allowed until the nesting season is completed, or unless suitable mitigation measures are approved by the program manager of MSCP and the Assistant Deputy Director of LDR/EAS.

Signature_____ Date

Katherine Leibel
Project Manager

Signature_____ Date

John E. Scandura, Chief
Southern California Branch
Office of Military Facilities